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# Cultural, Social and Family Shadows: Finding a Place in the Rainbow

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Cultural, Social and Family Shadows:

Finding a Place in the Rainbow

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APS 650: MAPS Capstone Seminar

Professor Brian Komei Dempster

May 17, 2019

## **Abstract**

Due to Chinese traditions, certain living environments are not friendly towards the LGBT community in China, who experience immense pressure to keep silent in the society. They often are discriminated against, and in the case of most, their families do not support them. It is difficult to have healthy self-identification for sexual minorities. Besides cultural and family pressure, and representation in media, the current legal framework and society are unfriendly to this community. There is no legislation on homosexuality in China at present, and China does not make any clear provisions on homosexual marriage.

In this environment, most LGBT people are not willing to disclose their identity or situation to other people. Some LGBTs enter fake marriages. Some in fake marriages cheat on their wives about their sexual orientation, and their wives cannot live in a regular marriage.

However, in recent years, the environment has become more flexible. Due to education and Internet, the new generation is changing its attitude to the LGBT group, and more and more sexual minorities are trying to come out.

Based on these changing conditions, there is a potential developing market, named the pink economy, which is the economy produced by the LGBT population. As the LGBT community grows, the pink economy has emerged, offering Internet social platforms, homosexual bars, and specific travel programs for the group. The pink economy greatly enhances the visibility of the LGBT community and attempts to use the power of commerce to increase public acceptance to the LGBT people.

**Keywords:** LGBT, China, Pink Economy, sexual minority, discrimination.

## **Introduction**

One of the least tolerant places for the LGBT community is China. Even after certain supposed changes, the community still finds acceptance by society difficult due to traditional culture, family pressure, and marriage expectations in China.

Due to the social norms surrounding monogamy, if a male chooses homosexuality, he cannot help produce offspring for future generations. In the Chinese cultural environment, this brings a kind of shame because it is an obligation to pass on the family's name. The one-child policy in China also leads to increased pressure on homosexuality in the family. With more than one child, the expectation of passing on the family name will not be just given to the one child, easing the burden on LGBTs.

Many in the older generation consider homosexuality a form of mental disease still today, and there are still some treatment clinics in China that use electric shock and other treatments on LGBT people in order to change their sexual orientation. LGBT people are forced to hide themselves and cannot embrace their own identity.

This research will focus on the living environment and a niche marketplace for sexual minorities in China, and how to improve their quality of life in China. In this section, I will address these questions: "What are the obstacles and challenges to the LGBT population in terms of cultural traditions, the institution of marriage, media representation, and business practices? How effective can the internet, education, and the pink economy be in supporting the LGBT community and their rights? "

## Cultural Social Stigma

While the Chinese government claims it has a fair, just, civilized and open modern society, the LGBT community is still discriminated against in China. They were considered illegal until 1997, only removed from the mental disorder category in 2001<sup>1</sup>, which was long past due, since homosexual was removed from ICD-10 by the Forty-third World Health Assembly in May 1990<sup>2</sup>. Influenced by the traditional ideas of ancient Chinese society that men should undertake the task of passing on the family line, an LGBT identity was considered to be a crime against humanity.

Due to the Chinese cultural codes, LGBTs are isolated from society. In Confucianism, the whole family, which includes parents and children, even all relatives, is the key to life, with an emphasis of the family above the individual, and the duty to the family more important than individual interest. Regeneration is one of the representative duties to the family so that the family can stay continuous. If a person tries to state that he or she is LGBT, this challenges the Chinese tradition—the idea that individual is more important than the family. Bisexual people are also put into a difficult position, because they must pretend to be heterosexual simply through marriage. Very few bisexuals will disclose their sexual orientation.

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia, s.v. “Homosexuality in China,” last modified April 6, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexuality\\_in\\_China](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexuality_in_China).

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia, s.v. “Homosexuality,” last modified May 4, 2019, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexuality>.

### Level of self-disclosure among LGBTs in China as of August 2014, by gender

Level of self-disclosure among LGBTs in China as of August 2014, by gender

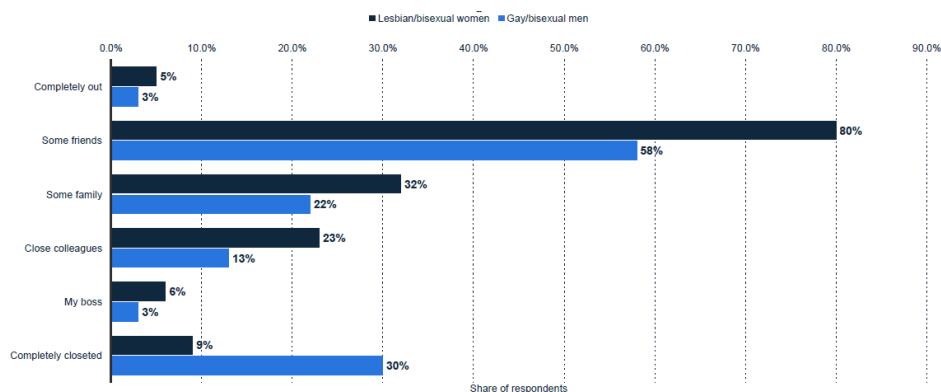


Figure 1. Level of self-disclosure among LGBTs in China as of August 2014, by gender <sup>3</sup>

Acceptance and identity are also different between gays and lesbians. According to the statistics regarding the LGBT community, lesbians had a much higher level of coming out than gays in 2014. Only 5% of lesbians as compared to 30% of gays were completely closeted, and about 32% lesbians disclosed their sexual orientation to their family, compared to 13% of gays. The difference could be the result of the Chinese tradition of passing on the family through the son, which puts most of pressure on men rather than women, so people, especially parents, have more tolerance of lesbians than gays.

The stereotype of the LGBT community by older generations is that homosexual and transgender people are abnormal, and even seen as disgusting, because LGBT people do not conform to cultural traditions. However, a high proportion of the younger

<sup>3</sup> Community Marketing & Insights. *Level of self-disclosure among LGBTs in China as of August 2014, by gender*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/324808/china-lgbt-level-of-self-disclosure-by-gender/>.

generation is less “opposed to the pathological view of [LGBT], stereotype-based prejudice, gender binary ideas, and gay related HIV stigma”. Certain sources show “an age-based difference in public opinion, with young people being more open towards and accepting of [sexual] minorities”.<sup>4</sup>

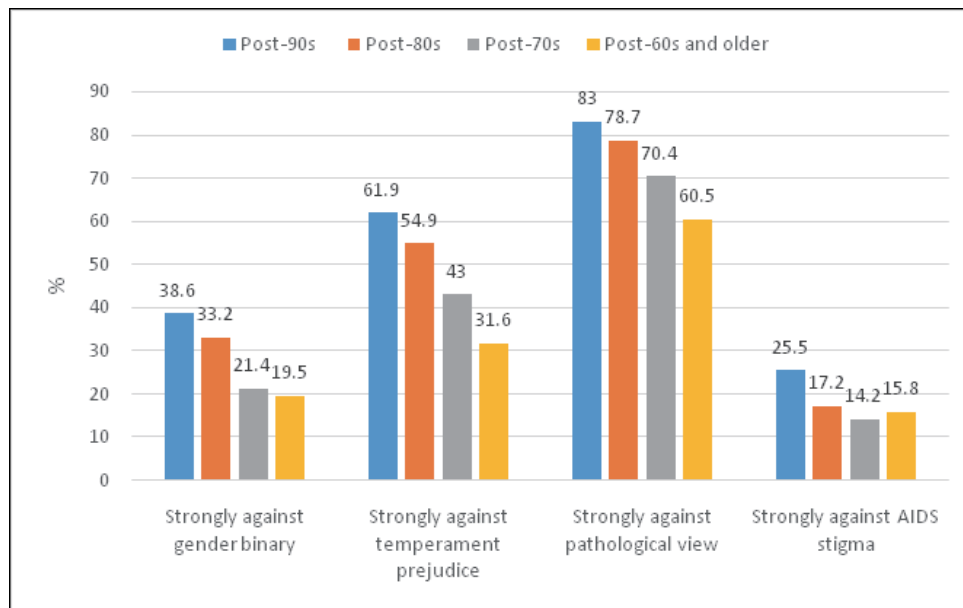


Figure 2. Respondents' attitudes towards minorities by age group (scale of rating) (%)<sup>5</sup>

The case of JinXing demonstrates the power of these cultural stigmas. JinXing, who is an outstanding dancer, is the first well known transgender person in China. Her name means Venus. In her autobiography *Half Dream*, she was once regarded as a monster, and was spurned by the public for a period of time. There were even unscrupulous people who threatened JinXing, cursing her to die soon, and more vicious people thought she should not live in the world. The reason for such brutal language is

<sup>4</sup> UN Development Programme (UNDP), *Being LGBT in Asia: China Country Report*, 2014. Page 19

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, Page 19.

simply because she has chosen to be herself. After all, Chinese society often excludes unconventional people from the mainstream. Those who have been abandoned by the public will also deeply experience unbearable loneliness. Many people will eventually collapse, and, at times, suffer irreparable tragedies. However, she has withstood all the harm, and has always adhered to her own heart and eventually became the person she wants to be.<sup>6</sup> In the following sections, my research will discuss the social pressures that JinXing and others must overcome.

### **Family Pressure**

Reinforcing the multiple forms of discrimination by society, “Families have the lowest degree of acceptance for [sexual] minorities,” namely those in the LGBT group, in China.<sup>7</sup> If gay or lesbian people do not want to admit their sexual orientation to their parents, their parents will force them to marry, breed, and spend the rest of their lives with someone who does not love them, putting their parents’ wishes above their own.

If LGBTs confess their sexuality to their parents and relatives, there will be a high probability that the parents will end up in great despair, because they want their children to be “normal” people like others. They hope that their children can find a partner of the opposite sex, so that their life can get back on track. These families do not realize that their behaviors are to forward their own agenda, such as trying to force a change in

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<sup>6</sup> *Half Dream*, JinXing. 2005. Zhongxin Press.

<sup>7</sup> UN Development Programme (UNDP), *Being LGBT in Asia: China Country Report*, 2014. Page 16.



the sexual orientation of their children to the same as normal people, and actually bring harm and frustration to their children. LGBT people need more understanding and support from their family. Parents should have a positive attitude and more understanding.

Fortunately, some families are supportive to their children. As a transgender, JinXing is one of the very few lucky people whose family supported her decision to have the operation decades ago. She also said that if she did not get the support of her father, she would not have achieved so much. She has been taken care of by her father and her sister for many years after the sex change operation.<sup>8</sup>

### **Self-Identification**

Social cultural stigmas combined with family pressure leads to complicated effects. The main consequence is the difficulty of self-identification. Most homosexual communities in China generally do have self-identification, but they are not willing to disclose to their true identities to others, including their parents. Based on the judgment of the society, they are afraid to come out, to avoid affecting their own lives, or changing their social status. Even some people unconsciously tend to be homophobic rather than self-identify as gay due to social and cultural stereotypes of homosexuals, attempting to avoid pressure caused by society.

When people realize they are gay or a sexual minority, including transgenders,

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<sup>8</sup> *Half Dream*, JinXing. 2005. Zhongxin Press.

they may react in different ways. These reactions are likely to be influenced by their cultural environment and life background.

In China, many people feel that the LGBT population is increasing. In fact, the proportion of the group in the society has not changed, but more people are aware of their same sex orientation, accepting themselves, and emerging into society. When others know that sexual minorities exist, it feels that the number of people is increasing. This also shows that the tolerance of society is increasing, but accurate data is still hard to get because of the silent people in the group.

Self-identification is a process. When some people first realize that they are LGBT, they may be very reluctant and helpless to accept the reality, as the result of the severe degree of homophobia and discrimination they face. This situation is very common, and many people have experienced struggles. LGBT people in most countries have experienced the stage of self-denial, and people in China are in the same stage now. Their acceptance of their sexual orientation is very reluctant.

Self-identity is a very important issue for sexual minorities. If everyone cannot accept themselves, we should have concerns about the status and future of the LGBT community in Chinese society. Some young people say that after discovering their sexual orientation, they feel that it will obviously have a serious negative impact on their own life, study, career, etc. A negative self-identity can also bring a variety of psychological problems to someone.

As sexual minorities, transgenders are the smallest group and yet the most deeply misunderstood and discriminated against. Self-identification becomes even more

complex for this population. In 1995, JinXing took a detailed psychological examination in the hospital before the sex change operation. The doctor gave her a booklet with more than a thousand questions which all about gender cognition were. The doctor said that “if 60% of the questions were answered correctly, it meant that you had a female tendency, but it had not yet reached the level of degeneration; only after 80%, it would reach the female standard and could be operated”. After JinXing answered all the questions, the result of the examination to female tendency was 94%. The doctor immediately said that she could have the surgery, and there was no problem at all.<sup>9</sup>

### LGBT community: Have you told someone at work about your sexual orientation?

Level of openness of Chinese LGBT in their workplace in China 2013, by gender

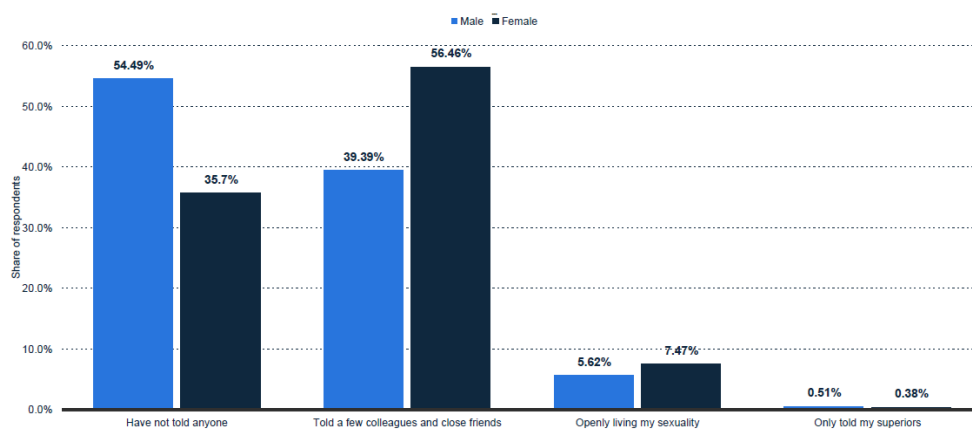


Figure 3. LGBT community: Have you told someone at work about your sexual orientation? <sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Half Dream*, Jinxing. 2005. Zhongxin Press.

<sup>10</sup> Aibai. *LGBT community: Have you told someone at work about your sexual orientation?*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/283232/china-workplace-coming-out/>.

### Reasons for LGBT in China not to disclose sexual orientation at work 2013, by gender

Reasons for LGBT in China not to disclose sexual orientation at work 2013, by gender

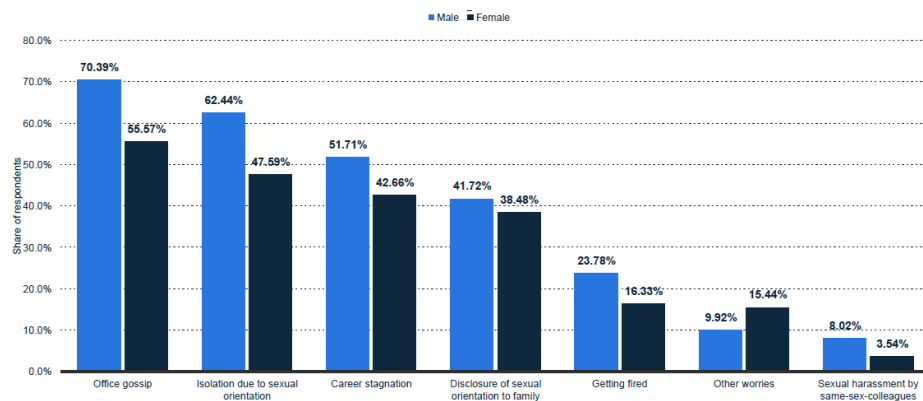


Figure 4. Reasons for LGBT in China not to disclose sexual orientation at work 2013, by gender.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, in the workplace in 2013, 54.49% of men and 35.7% of women had not told anyone their sexual orientation. However, 56.46% of women tended to tell a few close colleagues and friends, compared to 39.39% of men. Women were more likely to be open about their orientation. The major reasons why they do not openly announce their sexual orientation was still the fear of office gossip and isolation.

As Jaime Fullerton states, most homosexual people “never talked openly about their sexuality or gender identification at work. There are no employment laws in China that specifically outlaw discrimination on the basis of sexuality”, so they have to avoid revealing their identities because of the risk of losing their job.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Aibai. *Reasons for LGBT in China not to disclose sexual orientation at work 2013, by gender*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/289067/china-workplace-lgbt-not-coming-out-reasons-by-gender/>.

<sup>12</sup> Jamie Fullerton, “The Pink Yuan: How Chinese Business Is Embracing the LGBT Market,” *The Guardian*, Jan 5 2017.

## Marriage

Due to social pressures and discrimination, the issue of marriage becomes complicated. Instead of coming out, some enter a fake heterosexual marriage. Although both partners in heterosexual marriage and fake marriage are with the opposite sex and actually both appear to be fake, there is a difference between them. In the first marriage, the other person does not know that the marriage partner is homosexual. Essentially, this kind of marriage is secret even to their partners and can be seen as a form of betrayal.<sup>13</sup> For most homosexuals who marry the opposite sex, the first reason is that they want to conceal their sexual orientation, and another is that they want to satisfy their parents' desire to pass on the family's name. You can firmly say that you are a non-married person, or you can say that you have no time to keep the relationship because of your career, but some choose the way of marriage even though it will hurt another innocent person.

On the other side, in the nominal marriage, the other person is a homosexual, too. Nominal marriage means that marriage has only form and no substantive content.<sup>14</sup> It is a normal family on the surface which consists of a man and a woman. In fact, both husband and wife remain independent from one other. For homosexuals, it is also known as performative marriage in order to not face the pressure of the traditional society through a contractless marriage between men and women established based on

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<sup>13</sup> Susanne YP Choi, and Luo Ming. 2016. "Performative Family: Homosexuality, Marriage and Intergenerational Dynamics in China." *The British Journal of Sociology*, no. 2: 260. doi:10.1111/1468-4446.12196

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

friendship, which also can be called an asexual marriage. It is a kind of measure that husband and wife used to keep their true sexual orientation as a secret to their parents. It is a drama in which both the gay and the lesbian enter into an agreement, with specific scripts and respective roles. The target audience of both choices is the whole heterosexual society, especially the parents and relatives of homosexuals, to avoid coming out.

According to a UNDP survey in China, “nearly two thirds of minority respondents suggest that they feel under great pressure from their families to get married and have children. Among the married minority respondents, nearly 84.1% are married with heterosexuals, 13.2 are in “marriages of convenience” and 2.6% in same-sex marriages registered in foreign countries.”<sup>15</sup>

Gays and lesbians choose performative marriage in order to meet parents’ expectations of marriage or the need to protect their parents from social stigma. It also implies a lack of self-identification, and a desire to avoid coming out. Now more and more parents can accept the sexuality of their children, especially when their children have a happy life. However, some Chinese parents cannot accept their children are homosexual. Marriage is mainly for parents, but the details of life after marriage, responsibility and everyday matters are difficult to sustain. Furthermore, it is difficult to guarantee whether the husband or wife will abide by the prenuptial agreement.

With an increasing number of the LGBT community coming out, some countries in the world have passed relevant laws on homosexuality. The Netherlands passed a

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<sup>15</sup> UN Development Programme (UNDP), *Being LGBT in Asia: China Country Report*, 2014. Page 24.

groundbreaking law in 2000, allowing homosexual couples to marry and adopt children. Belgium, passed legislation in 2003, becoming the second country in the world to allow homosexual marriage, but does not allow homosexual adoption of children. In addition, some countries recognize homosexuality and recognize the legality of homosexual marriage, such as Denmark, Sweden, Spain, Portugal, Argentina, Canada, and some states in the United States. Even France, Germany, Finland, the United Kingdom, Italy and other countries have not approved homosexual marriage, but they have legally recognized the relations of homosexual couples.<sup>16</sup>

### **Tong Qi**

As a result of fake marriages, there is a small group of people who are “Tong Qi” which means gay men's wives. Professor Dalin Liu, a famous Chinese sociologist, has estimated that more than 90% of gay men will choose to marry, 80% of whom will enter marriage or are already married. 80% of these married men, through concealing sexual orientation, their goal of getting married or even having children is achieved.<sup>17</sup>

In Yinhe Li's conference review in 2009, it is said that there are about 20 million gay men in China, and their wives number about 16 million.<sup>18</sup> In the years since, this

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<sup>16</sup> Wikipedia, s.v. “Same-sex marriage,” last modified May 15, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex\\_marriage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex_marriage).

<sup>17</sup> Yinhe Li, “Pay attention to ‘gay’s wives’”, *Yinhe Li's Blog, Sina Blog*, May 6, 2009, [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_473d53360100dkiv.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_473d53360100dkiv.html).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

figure has likely increased because the population of the LGBT group has also increased.

The phenomenon of wives of gay people is fairly unique to Chinese culture, and is rarely seen in any other country in the world, because homosexuals in other countries are usually single, or cohabiting with their partner, or marry another homosexual, rarely entering a heterosexual marriage.<sup>19</sup> This is due to differences in cultures and acceptance of LGBTs in China and Western countries.

Those who can't figure out how to deal with the pressure of society and family choose to lie to women in order to marry them, living as heterosexuals. Their wives don't know their true sexual orientation. Wives of gay people not only cannot get satisfaction in their sexual life, but also suffer from neglect, indifference and even family violence. Their right to know the truth, sexual rights, and spouse rights, as a woman deserves, is mercilessly deprived by their gay husbands.

As physical and emotional life is not satisfied, and it is shameful to confide to people and they dare not complain loudly, they are suppressed for a long time. They are often afraid of being mocked and discriminated against, and can only find sympathy in the virtual online community. In Weibo and Tieba, you will find wives of gay people connecting with each other. Their depression in real life only can be understood in those online communities. For selfish reasons, sometimes gay people's parents do know the truth about the situation, but are complicit in their child cheating on his wife, because most of them have a common purpose which is childbirth.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



As a typical case of TongQi in China, in June 2012, Hongling Luo, a teacher at the Sichuan International Studies University who was just admitted into a PhD degree program, killed herself by jumping from the 13th floor of an apartment building. Hongling Luo's death is the result of her husband Cheng concealing his homosexuality and entering marriage by lying to her, which caused fierce conflict between them. In Luo's Weibo, she said, "during the first five months in the newly married, sex was less than five times. If this is not a fake marriage, what is the fake marriage?" She suffered from acute depression after realizing the truth, and decided to jump off the building.<sup>20</sup>

## Media

While these tragedies are horrific, they all have a common root: the homophobia in Chinese culture perpetuated not just by family and marriage expectations but reinforced by the media. The image presented by the media is far from comprehensive nor accurate. Some mainstream media prefer to focus on negative facts, like Tong Qi and often highlight them in sensationalist headlines. In addition, the visibility of the LGBT group in the media is low, and traditional news media coverage, especially by mainstream news media, is even rarer.

In recent years, the environment has become more flexible. LGBT organizations are not as silent as before, and they are trying to participate in a series of movements to promote equal rights and eliminate discrimination. Even *People's Daily*, one of the

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<sup>20</sup> Details of the Suicide of Hongling Luo, Henan commercial newspaper, <https://www.douban.com/group/topic/36882071/>.

newspapers managed by government, has posted commentary that makes an appeal to the public to regard homosexuals as ordinary people. To overcome the suppression of mainstream media, most post comments online, and they even sponsor marathon events.<sup>21</sup>

Although the civil rights movement is constantly evolving in China, and the tolerance of society is improving, public acceptance is still limited. In June 2017, China changed the regulation that banned homosexual related content in online video and audio.<sup>22</sup> The misunderstanding of the LGBT community is due to ignorance, and the negative report of the mainstream media.

In April 2018, Sina (one of largest social media organizations in China, and the Chinese version of Twitter) released an announcement to ban all homosexual related posts for a clean and harmonious public environment. Three days later, the previous announcement was revoked. During the three days, many users posted on the two hashtags, “I am a Gay” and “I am a friend of Gays”, to express their opinions regarding the announcement. As a result, the related posts were also quickly deleted. However, it also reflects the changes in Internet users' attitude towards homosexuality.<sup>23</sup>

Unexpectedly, Weibo was subjected to criticism from one of the official media

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<sup>21</sup> TangBao, “Hangzhou Rainbow Marathon Schedule and Precautions,” *Sohu*, November 2, 2017, [http://www.sohu.com/a/201903021\\_651446](http://www.sohu.com/a/201903021_651446)

<sup>22</sup> General rules for reviewing netcasting content (passed June 30, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Steven Jiang, “Rare win for China's LGBT community after censorship U-turn by Sina Weibo,” *Cable News Network*, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/16/asia/china-sina-weibo-lgbt-censorship-intl/index.html>

outlets. *The People's Daily* (the Communist Party's mouthpiece) published an article on social media, saying that homosexuals are “a minority group of the society regarding sexual orientation, and it's the obligation of a just society to protect the rights of minorities.”<sup>24</sup> Some might see this article as a sign of a changing attitude in the government.

Besides regulations in the media, the legal framework is also unfriendly to the LGBT community. Laws about marriage also perpetuate discrimination. The silent media and unfriendly laws increase the barriers between the LGBT population and the rest of society. For instance, there is a blank area which means no related legal provision about homosexuals in the laws concerning marriage in China. Therefore, it is impossible for LGBT persons to register for marriage. It is well known that if a same sex couple goes to the Civil Affairs Bureau to apply for marriage registration, the Civil Affairs Bureau may not accept the application because the legal basis for registration of same-sex marriage is not within the scope of acceptance.

There is no legislation on this field in China at present, which leaves a void in the law. Also, China does not make any clear provision on homosexual marriage in the legislation. Although homosexuality is not prohibited by the law, nor in the case of marriage of same sex couple, it does not mean that China accepts homosexual marriage, because the keyword "men and women" has been repeatedly mentioned in the Marriage Law of China. It can be seen that marriage recognized by China must

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<sup>24</sup> People's Daily, "Different fireworks can also blossom," Sina Weibo, <https://www.weibo.com/ttarticle/p/show?id=2309404229113077434315>.

consist of one man and one woman, and it is obvious that homosexuality does not meet the requirement. The law remains silent on homosexuality, which means that there is no legal norm to support the legalization of homosexuality, but also there is no sign of opposition in the law. In judicial practice, how to determine and resolve the issue in the court depends entirely on the judge presiding over the case.

The media has a great influence on the public's tolerance for the LGBT community. Therefore, the use of the Internet to establish popular science websites, and get more extensive knowledge of LGBT society, will help the public to reduce discrimination and misunderstanding of them. Social media has an important guiding and significant role in disseminating the correct message to the public. The objective and true reports on this will help guide public opinion and promote the public's correct understanding of sexual minority issues. However, one must acknowledge that “the visibility of sexual minorities in the media is very low, especially in traditional mass media.”<sup>25</sup> In addition, what is presented about them by the media is far from objective fact. Most language about LGBTs in the traditional media is negative, and that may project a wrong impression of LGBT people to the public.

Through the UNDP survey, the attitude to the LGBT community varies from individual to individual. Age and education have a significant impact on the acceptance level. From the influence of these factors, the younger the age, the higher level of education, and the truth is that more the Internet is used as the main source of

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<sup>25</sup> UN Development Programme (UNDP), *Being LGBT in Asia: China Country Report*, 2014. Page 19.

information, the greater acceptance level.<sup>26</sup> The most crucial factor is the education about sexual minorities. Some countries have adopted legislation to protect the rights of the group, but there is almost no relevant laws and policies in China. Even it's hard to change the law and regulation about homosexual in China, the public acceptance for LGBT will increase with more positive media and internet representation as well as education.

## **Education**

Like the internet, the education system both poses problems yet can help lead towards solutions. The school system still does not have any comprehensive sex education, and not “any mention of gender diversity. However, around 10% of the respondents indicated that they had received gender diversity education at schools,” and it was mainly during undergraduate years and later.<sup>27</sup> This expectation shows an improved attitude in the number of people receiving such education. But the small percentage of those educated “also points to the need to expand gender diversity education to reach more students at the same stage of education and also to reach out to students at other earlier stages of education.”<sup>28</sup>

Among the younger generation of students, the Internet has played a key role in communication. Fortunately, the Internet expands connections. Through the Internet,

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. Page 22.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. Page 21.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. Page 22.

people can get more information. The expansion of one's vision is often the beginning of the elimination of one's prejudice and ignorance. Misconceptions about homosexuality are ingrained and unmovable for many, especially previous generations. However, when they see other countries have recognized the legalization of homosexual marriage, even the United States, one of the world's most influential country, announced through the Federal Supreme Court in 2016, then they might change.

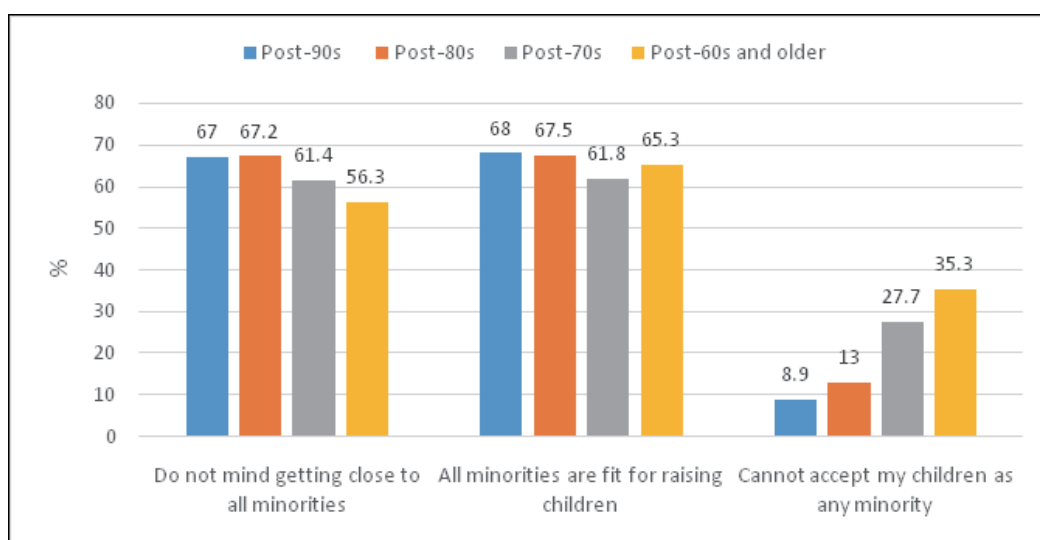


Figure 5. Respondents' attitudes towards minorities by age group (hypothetical questions) (%)<sup>29</sup>

In this chart, the blue, orange, grey, and yellow columns represent post-90s, post-80s, post-70s and post-60s and older. The chart shows that the older the less acceptance of their LGBT children, and even do not want to get close to minorities.

The Internet (including mobile Internet access), which is more inclusive of LGBT group than traditional media (such as newspaper, magazine, radio, television), serves as one main source of information. The primary way for the public to access

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, page 19.

LGBT information is through various media as there is insufficient sexual education in schools. Thus, the internet is important for the public's understanding of the group, and it also has a major impact on public attitudes about them. The information on the Internet is open and diverse, so people who use the Internet as their main source of information is more likely to accept new things, and their ideas are more inclusive and open. That's why young people are more open to LGBT people.

### **Comparison to Taiwan**

In order to see a possible model China can follow, we can look to Taiwan. Taiwan, on 21 February 2019, “the Executive Yuan passed a draft bill, entitled the Enforcement Act of Judicial Yuan Interpretation No. 748. The draft bill serves as the legal basis for same-sex marriages and has been sent to the Legislative Yuan for fast-tracked review before being enacted on 24 May 2019.”

According to Wikipedia, “On 24 May 2017, the Constitutional Court ruled that the current marriage laws are unconstitutional and that same-sex couples should have the right to marry, and therefore Taiwan became the first place in Asia to legalize same-sex marriage. The court has given the Parliament a maximum of two years to amend or enact laws so that same-sex marriage is legally recognized. According to the court ruling, if the Parliament fails to do so by 24 May 2019, same-sex marriage will automatically become legal.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Wikipedia, s.v. “LGBT rights in Taiwan,” last modified April 28, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT\\_rights\\_in\\_Taiwan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_rights_in_Taiwan).

With the same cultural traditions as the mainland of China, why is Taiwan more open to the LGBT population? What is the difference between them? The answer includes the cultural environment as influenced by media, education, and legislation.

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Taiwan had the first systematic introduction of Western gender theory among the three sides of the Taiwan Strait.<sup>31</sup> People in Taiwan gradually realized the rights of LGBT and supported LGBT movies and artistic expression, like *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003), *Eternal Summer* (2006), etc. The government would not interfere too much with the LGBT-themed movies and books, giving freedom of speech to publications. As a result, books and movies and television works involving homosexuality emerged in an endless stream, which awakened Taiwanese society's attention to gender issues and sexual minorities.

In “LGBT rights in Taiwan,” we find that “Discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and other gender-related attributes in education has been banned since June 2004 when the Gender Equity Education Act was passed.” The anti-sexist education advocated by the Gender Equity Education Act has exerted a subtle influence on schools and campuses in Taiwan. The source further states, “In 2007 and 2008, the Legislative Yuan passed amendments to two employment laws banning discrimination based on sexual orientation at work. In March 2010, the Ministry of Education announced that, starting from 2011, school curriculum and textbooks would include topics on LGBT rights and non-discrimination. According to

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.



the Ministry, the reform seeks to ‘root out discrimination’, since ‘students should be able to grow up happily in an environment of tolerance and respect’.”<sup>32</sup>

Gender equality education in Taiwan includes multi-sex education, which aims to enable students to understand different genders, different sexual orientations, to create an inclusive, diverse and open campus environment and reduce campus bullying. The younger generation of Taiwanese who grew up here has a higher acceptance of sexual minorities. On the other hand, the sequential legislation banning discrimination chiefly eliminate the discrimination in most aspects in their living environment, increasing the acceptance in the public. Since China has similar values and traditions to Taiwan, this demonstrates the possibility that, at some point, this could happen there, too.

### **Pink Economy**

Along with the internet, education, and possible models for China to follow, the economy is shifting and advocating rights for this community. In China there is a potential market called the Pink Economy—an economy produced for the LGBT population, which “is the third largest market in the country targeting the LGBT community in the world, and it is currently valued at \$300 billion per annum.”<sup>33</sup>

Because of the increasing population of the LGBT group, the pink economy has

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Shan Juan, “‘Pink Economy’ set to soar as companies target LGBT community”, ChinaDaily, December 1, 2016,

[http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-12/01/content\\_27533401\\_3.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-12/01/content_27533401_3.htm).

emerged, which includes Internet social platforms, homosexual bars, and specific travel programs for the group. However, this does not mean that pink economy should exist only in places where the LGBT community lives. If those of diverse sexual orientation in a society cannot reveal their identities, they may feel forced to live a heterosexual life, and the pink economy in these places may not exist.

Through the market, more people will become aware of and concerned about the status of the LGBT community and their rights. And even if some people just want to make money from those people, they also should understand their living environment as a part of ethical, effective market research practices.

In order to understand the Pink Economy, we must look at the concept of Pink Capitalism—“a form of capitalism combined with LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer) populations, targeting them as current or potential customers. Part of the business model connects the LGBTQ public to the arts, and increases the visibility of queer creative professionals, but one must also be careful not to further perpetuate the formation of stereotypes and create a barrier for LGBT people.”

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The complex living environment of LGBT populations leads to the potential and dangerous pink market. With a more flexible and tolerant environment, the Pink Economy targeting LGBT consumers can be developed further. Even though there is

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<sup>34</sup> Lorenzo Yeh, *Pink Capitalism: Perspectives and Implications for Cultural Management* (University of Barcelona, 2018) 2.

the customer demand, some potential customers are not willing to participate in the market based on a closed environment. Some LGBT businesses succeed and some fail, affected by factors like geographic position, local culture, and target customer. To fulfill the potential pink economy, avoiding failure is the biggest question businesspeople need to overcome.

Integrating technology is often a feature of successful business venture. One of the most popular fields in the Pink Economy is dating software, and Blued is one of biggest gay dating apps. In the interview of Baoli Ma, who is the founder and chief executive of Blued, he said his app was not only a profitable project just aiming to make money, but also a public welfare project providing a space that people like him could find peers. In that way, they could get a kind of social identity from the same group of people since it's hard to be accepted by their families.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, businesses, such as Starbucks, Alibaba, Nike and Adidas, always have marketed themselves as LGBT-friendly in China.<sup>36</sup> The motivations of the businesses to support LGBT population from the perspective of seeking profit in capital, it can be attributed to expand the range of selected talents to obtain the highest level of productivity, and to show the broadest market to multi-level consumers.

Finally, in today's social environment, the pink group needs to find a place to relax

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<sup>35</sup> Ma Baoli, "Meet the ex-cop behind China's largest Grindr-style gay dating app," interview by Meng Jing, and Xinyan Yu, *South China Morning Post*, July 3, 2018.

<sup>36</sup> Susanne YP Choi, and Luo Ming. 2016. "Performative Family: Homosexuality, Marriage and Intergenerational Dynamics in China." *The British Journal of Sociology*, no. 2: 260. doi:10.1111/1468-4446.12196

so that they don't need to hide their sexual orientation and deep unhappiness. In the long term, the pink economy is far more important than the potential market. What the pink economy really needs to do is to improve social identity and self-awareness in order to encourage empathy and a sense of community.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the misunderstanding towards the LGBT community is mainly due to ignorance. Intolerant attitudes, family pressure, and unfriendly laws increase the barriers between LGBT people and other people. The Chinese government should stop keeping silent and offer proper guidance to public opinion, so that the education will improve the living environment of the LGBT community in China.

To improve the living environment of LGBT people in China, first, education about sex should be popularized. In order to eliminate people's misunderstandings and prejudice against sexual minorities, we need to help LGBT groups to strengthen their self-identification. At the same time, we also must educate children and help shape the sexual morality of Chinese people.

The mainstream media has to open up objective and positive public opinion about the LGBT community, such as the approval of related films and publications. People should also avoid looking at LGBT people from a traditional heterosexual perspective. The so-called "one man and one woman" model is an outdated, inaccurate way to look at LGBT groups. We need to reshape our perspectives. For

example, we should not assume a man with a soft character is more feminine or that a man who exhibits traditional masculinity is heterosexual.

Finally, the legalization of same-sex marriage is a matter of course. The first step is for the law to recognize the existence of LGBT people and the rights of them, so as to protect LGBT groups from being discriminated. This step should be carried out in parallel with progress via the education and internet. The public will have a more open attitude towards LGBT community through understanding LGBT people and getting more information about them. The final step is to formally confirm the rights of LGBT people, such as anti-discrimination in the labor law and the legality of same-sex marriage in the law of marriage. It can only be promoted with low resistance after the nation has a much fairer and more tolerant attitude towards the gay community. Experts and scholars, like Yinhe Li, have also proposed relevant proposals in LiangHui.<sup>37</sup> Solving these problems in legislation and law is bound to be a long process, and it will also be the key to increasing the public's tolerance for the LGBT community.

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<sup>37</sup> A common Mandarin Chinese abbreviation for a pair of organizations which have close relations.

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